

Ready for a “death-defying flight through apocalyptic devastation”? Thorpe Park, 20 miles outside central London, says its \$30 million Swarm roller coaster will open next month, despite a disastrous test run in January. Dummies lost limbs (*above*) after clipping a life-size church—built dangerously close to the ride to make riders vulnerable to “extreme near-misses.” The glitches are fixed, according to the park’s director, who says the mishap is collateral damage in the park’s larger mission. “We’ve pushed the boundaries to the absolute limit,” he told the *Daily Mail*, “because ‘extreme’ is what our thrill-seeking customers demand.” •

China

Too Much Reality?



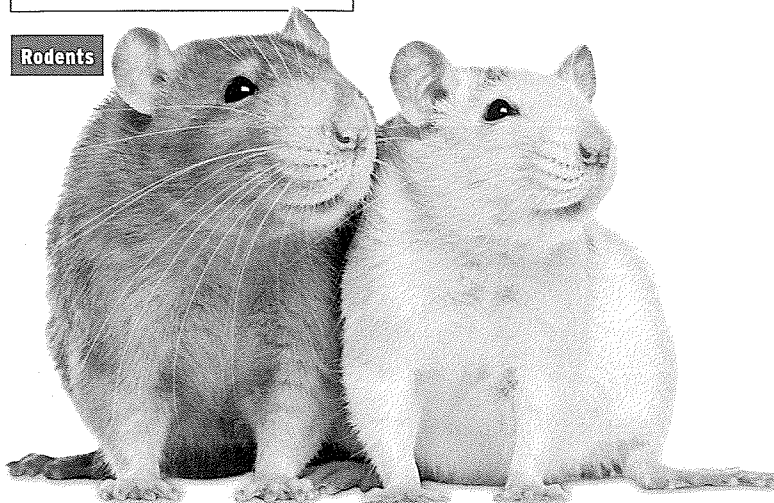
If You Are the One: China’s version of the dating game.

The dating show *If You Are the One* was a smash hit when it debuted in China in 2010, attracting more than 50 million viewers. Guys boasted about their bank accounts and fancy cars, while women talked about their ambition to marry rich men—with one contestant telling a suitor that she’d “rather sit and cry in the back of a BMW” than ride a bicycle with

him on a date. But all this reality TV proved a bit too real for China’s censors, who threatened to cancel the “vulgar” show for promoting materialistic values. Even after the producers toned it down, censors issued a new policy for TV that took effect last month. It’s designed to curb “excessive entertainment,” wiping out scores of dating shows, game shows, and

celebrity talk shows. It’s all part of President Hu Jintao’s effort to more tightly control culture—including movies, publishing, and the Web, in addition to TV. “TV is supposed to be the mouthpiece of the [Communist] Party,” says one former staffer on *If You Are the One*. “You’re supposed to broadcast propaganda instead of sensationalist content.” •

Rodents



Feeling each other's pain: Rats show empathy, according to a new study.

Not Such Dirty Rats

The next time you accuse someone of "ratting out" a friend, consider this: It may be the last thing an actual rat would do. Researchers at the University of Chicago set up an experiment to see if rats feel empathy. When uncaged rats were placed near a caged rat, the free rats showed signs of distress—the simplest

form of empathy, which until now has been observed only in humans and primates. And after the free rats figured out how to open the cage to spring the captive rodents, they did so repeatedly. Even more surprising, when given the choice between unlocking a cage holding a rat or one containing chocolate, the free rats played

Good Samaritan 50 percent of the time; even when they chose the chocolate, they almost always shared it. There was, however, a difference between male and female rats. While the females chose to help their caged friends every day, says Peggy Mason, the study's author, "the male rats would occasionally take off a day." •

Time

HEY, JUST A SECOND!

Last month, the United Nations gathered 70 delegates in Geneva, Switzerland, to discuss a mere second. Specifically, they were debating whether to abolish the leap second, which scientists occasionally add to the atomic clock to sync it up with Earth's rotation. (The atomic clock is a more precise measure of time than the Earth's rotation.) Unlike leap years, which happen every four years—including 2012—and mean an extra day in February, leap seconds are added sporadically: The last one was in 2008 and the next will be on June 30. The U.S. wants to lose the leap second, fearing that the extra seconds will eventually create problems for air traffic control, the stock markets, cellphone networks, and other computers that sync up with the atomic clock. Other countries, though, say losing the leap second would cause a mess of its own, making noon slide gradually earlier and earlier. A consensus couldn't be reached, so the delegates decided to take three more years to study a second. •

News & Trends was reported by Sindya N. Bhanoo, Edward Wong, Natasha Singer, and Kenneth Chang of *The New York Times*; and Veronica Majerol.

Space

The Milky Way's True Colors

The ancient Greeks, it turns out, did a great job naming our galaxy.

Astronomers have recently determined the color of the Milky Way, which is in fact milky—or, to be precise, the color of spring snow an hour after sunrise or before sunset. A galaxy's color is important. It gives astronomers clues about how many stars are in the galaxy and how old the stars are. The color of the Milky Way (a translation of the ancient Greek *galaxias*, which is derived from the Greek word for milk) has long been a mystery. It's 100,000 light-years across, and because Earth is nestled well inside the galaxy and clouds of gas and dust obstruct views, astronomers can observe only 1,000 to 2,000 light-years in any direction. So they measured millions of other galaxies with a special telescope and used the colors of galaxies similar to the Milky Way to determine its color. So what does its color tell us? The Milky Way is middle-aged, with stars being born, but not as often as in younger galaxies. •



It turns out, our galaxy is aptly named.

I-STOCKPHOTO (RAT); STOCKTREK/CORBIS (MILKY WAY)

NUMBERS IN THE NEWS

\$700,000

AMOUNT paid for a 593-pound bluefin tuna auctioned at a Tokyo fish market last month.

SOURCE: THE TELEGRAPH (U.K.)

8

NUMBER of states that raised their hourly minimum wage last month (see p. 12).

SOURCE: THE NEW YORK TIMES

33,000 yrs

AGE of a dog skull recently discovered in a Siberian cave. It presents some of the oldest known evidence of dog domestication.

SOURCE: SCIENCEDAILY.COM

2

NUMBER of years a sandwich created by the U.S. Army stays fresh. Controlling pH, moisture, and oxygen prevents bacteria and mold from growing.

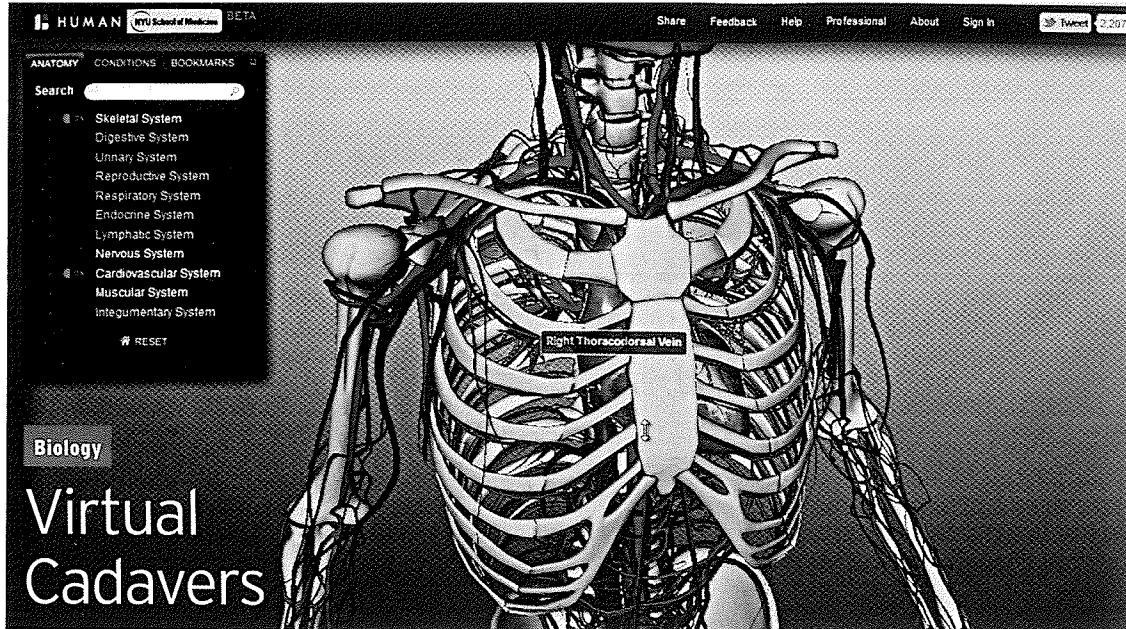
SOURCE: NPR NEWS

66%

PERCENTAGE of Americans who believe it's important for a presidential candidate to have strong religious beliefs (see p. 16).

SOURCE: PUBLIC RELIGION RESEARCH INSTITUTE

FRED R. CONRAD/THE NEW YORK TIMES (VIRTUAL CADAVERS); STEFANO BIANCHETTI/CORBIS (DA VINCI); SIPA/NEWS.COM (PURSE)



Dissecting a human cadaver has been a rite of passage for medical students for centuries. But corpses can be less-than-ideal teaching tools in anatomy class, with organs missing after surgery or deteriorated because of death or disease. Now, in addition to doing traditional dissections, medical students at New York University are swapping their scrubs and surgical gloves for 3-D glasses and a mouse for a class in virtual anatomy. On screen, the body looks more vivid than the real thing, and with a click of the mouse, students can see up close how deep-blue veins and bright-red arteries make the heart pump. But whether the high-definition version of anatomy is more useful than a blood-and-gore dissection is a matter of debate. "In a cadaver, if you remove an organ, you cannot add it back in as if it were never removed," says Chana Rich, a first-year NYU med student from Connecticut. Others aren't sure the technology can ever replace cadavers. When it comes to a human organ, says one of Rich's classmates, "There's something about being able to hold it and turn it in your hand." •

NYU med students can now digitally dissect the human body.

Fashion

Mona Lisa's Purse?



It's the hottest new handbag in the fashion world, but it's actually more than 500 years old. The "Pretiosa," which means *precious* in Latin, was designed in about 1497

by Leonardo da Vinci, the Italian Renaissance artist who's most famous for painting the *Mona Lisa*. The sketch was actually discovered by a da Vinci scholar back in 1978, in the *Codex Atlanticus*—a 12-volume collection of da Vinci drawings and writings, now housed in Milan. But only recently has the sketch been brought to life in a real purse. Gherardini, a luxury handbag maker in Florence, has



Leonardo da Vinci and the 2012 handbag based on his 1497 sketches

created 99 copies of the leather bag, which are set to go on sale March 1. To da Vinci scholars, his fashion hobby is no surprise. Da Vinci was a Renaissance man in every sense of the word: He not only painted, but he also dabbled in math, music, and

science, even coming up with designs for helicopters and solar panels centuries before they became realities. The Pretiosa made its debut last month at a Florence fashion show. There's no word yet on how much the bags will cost. •